

COINTELPRO

From Anarchopedia

COINTELPRO (an acronym for **C**ounter **I**ntelligence **P**rogram) was a series of covert, and often illegal,^[1] projects conducted by the United States Wikipedia:Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) aimed at surveiling, infiltrating, discrediting, and disrupting domestic Wikipedia:political organizations.

COINTELPRO tactics included discrediting targets through psychological warfare; smearing individuals and groups using forged documents and by planting false reports in the media; harassment; wrongful imprisonment; and illegal violence, including Wikipedia:assassination.^{[2][3][4]} Covert operations under COINTELPRO took place between 1956 and 1971; however, the FBI has used covert operations against domestic political groups since its inception.^[5] The FBI's stated motivation at the time was "protecting Wikipedia:national security, preventing violence, and maintaining the existing social and political order."^[6]

FBI records show that 85% of COINTELPRO resources targeted groups and individuals that the FBI deemed "subversive,"^[7] including communist(WP) and socialist (WP) organizations; organizations and individuals associated with the Wikipedia:civil rights movement, including Wikipedia:Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others associated with the Wikipedia:Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Wikipedia:National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Wikipedia:Congress of Racial Equality and other civil rights organizations; black nationalist groups; the Wikipedia:American Indian Movement; a broad range of organizations labeled "New Left" (WP), including Students for a Democratic Society and the Weathermen; almost all groups protesting the Wikipedia:Vietnam War, as well as individual student demonstrators with no group affiliation; the Wikipedia:National Lawyers Guild; organizations and individuals associated with the Wikipedia:women's rights movement; nationalist groups such as those seeking independence for Wikipedia:Puerto Rico, Wikipedia:United Ireland, and Cuban exile movements including Wikipedia:Orlando Bosch's Cuban Power and the Wikipedia:Cuban Nationalist Movement; and additional notable Americans, such as Wikipedia:Albert Einstein (who was a member of several civil rights groups).^[8] The remaining 15% of COINTELPRO resources were expended to marginalize and subvert "white hate groups," including the Wikipedia:Ku Klux Klan and the Wikipedia:National States' Rights Party.^[9]

FBI Director Wikipedia:J. Edgar Hoover issued directives governing COINTELPRO, ordering FBI agents to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize" the activities of these movements and their leaders.^{[10][11]}

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History

COINTELPRO began in 1956 and was designed to "increase factionalism, cause disruption and win defections" inside the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA). However, the program was soon enlarged to include disruption of the Socialist Workers Party (1961), the Wikipedia:Ku Klux Klan (1964), the Wikipedia:Nation of Islam, the Wikipedia:Black Panther Party (1967), and the entire Wikipedia:New Left social/political movement, which included antiwar, community, and religious groups (1968). A later investigation by the Senate's Wikipedia:Church Committee (see below) stated that "COINTELPRO began in 1956, in part because of frustration with Supreme Court rulings limiting the Government's power to proceed overtly against dissident groups..."^[12] Congress and several court cases^[13] later concluded that the COINTELPRO operations against communist and socialist groups exceeded statutory limits on FBI activity and violated constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and association.

Program exposed

The program was successfully kept secret until 1971, when the Wikipedia:Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI burglarized an FBI field office in Media, Wikipedia:Pennsylvania, took several dossiers, and exposed the program by passing this information to Wikipedia:news agencies. Many news organizations initially refused to publish the information. Within the year, Director Hoover declared that the centralized COINTELPRO was over, and that all future Wikipedia:counterintelligence operations would be handled on a case-by-case basis.^[14]

Further documents were revealed in the course of separate lawsuits filed against the FBI by Wikipedia:NBC correspondent Carl Stern, the Socialist Workers Party, and a number of other groups. A major investigation was launched in 1976 by the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the United States Senate, commonly referred to as the "Wikipedia:Church Committee" for its chairman, Senator Wikipedia:Frank Church of Wikipedia:Idaho. However, millions of pages of

documents remain unreleased, and many released documents have been partly, or entirely, redacted.

In the Final Report of the Select Committee, COINTELPRO was castigated in no uncertain terms:

Many of the techniques used would be intolerable in a democratic society even if all of the targets had been involved in violent activity, but COINTELPRO went far beyond that...the Bureau conducted a sophisticated vigilante operation aimed squarely at preventing the exercise of First Amendment rights of speech and association, on the theory that preventing the growth of dangerous groups and the propagation of dangerous ideas would protect the national security and deter violence.^[12]

The Church Committee documented a history of use of the agency for purposes of Wikipedia:political repression as far back as World War I (WP), through the 1920s, when agents were charged with rounding up "anarchists and revolutionaries" for deportation, and then building from 1936 through 1976.

Intended effects

The intended effect of the FBI's COINTELPRO was to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, or otherwise neutralize" groups that the FBI believed were "subversive"^[15] by instructing FBI field operatives to^[16]:

1. create a negative public image for target groups (e.g. by surveilling activists, and then releasing negative personal information to the public)
2. break down internal organization (e.g. by having agents exacerbate racial tensions, or send anonymous letters to try to create conflicts)
3. create dissension between groups (e.g. by spreading rumors that other groups were stealing money)
4. restrict access to public resources (e.g. by pressuring non-profit organizations to cut off funding or material support)
5. restrict the ability to organize protests (e.g. agents sending letters promoting violence against police at protests)
6. restrict the ability of individuals to participate in group activities (e.g. by character assassinations, false arrests, surveillance)

Range of targets

In an interview with the BBC's (WP) Wikipedia:Andrew Marr, MIT professor of linguistics and political activist Noam Chomsky (WP) spoke about the purpose and the targets of COINTELPRO saying, "COINTELPRO was a program of subversion carried out not by a couple of petty crooks but by the national political police, the FBI, under four administrations... by the time it got through, I won't run through the whole story, it was aimed at the entire new left, at the women's movement, at the whole black movement, it was extremely broad. Its actions went as far as political assassination." ^[17]

According to the Church Committee:

While the declared purposes of these programs were to protect the "national security" or prevent violence, Bureau witnesses admit that many of the targets were nonviolent and most had no connections with a foreign power. Indeed, nonviolent organizations and individuals were targeted because the Bureau believed they represented a "potential" for violence -- and nonviolent citizens who were against the war in Vietnam were targeted because they gave "aid and comfort" to violent demonstrators by lending respectability to their cause.

The imprecision of the targeting is demonstrated by the inability of the Bureau to define the subjects of the programs. The Black Nationalist program, according to its supervisor, included "a great number of organizations that you might not today characterize as black nationalist but which were in fact primarily black." Thus, the nonviolent Southern Christian Leadership Conference was labeled as a Black Nationalist-"Hate Group."

Furthermore, the actual targets were chosen from a far broader group than the titles of the programs would imply. The CPUSA program targeted not only Communist Party members but also sponsors of the Wikipedia:National Committee to Abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee and civil rights leaders allegedly under Communist influence or deemed to be not sufficiently "anti-Communist". The Socialist Workers Party program included non-SWP sponsors of anti-war demonstrations which were cosponsored by the SWP or the Young Socialist Alliance, its youth group. The Black Nationalist program targeted a range of organizations from the Panthers to SNCC to the peaceful Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and included every Black Student Union and many other black student groups. New Left targets ranged from the SDS to the InterUniversity Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy, from Wikipedia:Antioch College ("vanguard of the New Left") to the New Mexico Free University and other "alternate" schools, and from underground newspapers to students' protesting university censorship of a student publication by carrying signs with four-letter words on them.

Examples of surveillance, spanning all presidents from FDR to Nixon, both legal and illegal, contained in the Church Committee report:^[18]

- President Roosevelt asked the FBI to put in its files the names of citizens sending telegrams to the White House opposing his "national defense" policy and supporting Col. Wikipedia:Charles Lindbergh.
- President Truman received inside information on a former Roosevelt aide's efforts to influence his appointments, labor union negotiating plans, and the publishing plans of journalists.
- President Eisenhower received reports on purely political and social contacts with foreign officials by Wikipedia:Bernard Baruch, Wikipedia:Eleanor Roosevelt, and Supreme Court Justice Wikipedia:William O. Douglas.
- The Kennedy administration had the FBI wiretap a congressional staff member, three executive officials, a lobbyist, and a Washington law firm. Wikipedia:US Attorney General Wikipedia:Robert F. Kennedy received the fruits of an FBI wire tap on Wikipedia:Martin Luther King, Jr. and an electronic listening device targeting a congressman, both of which yielded information of a political nature.
- President Johnson asked the FBI to conduct "name checks" of his critics and members of the staff of his 1964 opponent, Senator Wikipedia:Barry Goldwater. He also requested purely political intelligence on his critics in the Senate, and received

extensive intelligence reports on political activity at the Wikipedia:1964 Democratic Convention from FBI electronic surveillance.

- President Nixon authorized a program of wiretaps which produced for the White House purely political or personal information unrelated to national security, including information about a Supreme Court Justice.

The COINTELPRO documents show numerous cases of the FBI's intentions to prevent and disrupt protests against the Vietnam War (WP). Many techniques were used to accomplish this task. "These included promoting splits among antiwar forces, encouraging Wikipedia:red-baiting of socialists, and pushing violent confrontations as an alternative to massive, peaceful demonstrations." One 1966 Cointelpro operation attempted to redirect the Socialist Workers Party from their pledge of support for the antiwar movement.^[19]

The FBI claims that it no longer undertakes COINTELPRO or COINTELPRO-like operations. However, critics claim that agency programs in the spirit of COINTELPRO targeted groups such as the Wikipedia:Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador,^[20] the Wikipedia:American Indian Movement,^{[5][21]} Wikipedia:Earth First!,^[22] the White Separatist Movement,^[23] and the Anti-Globalization Movement (WP).

Methods

According to attorney Brian Glick in his book *War at Home*, the FBI used four main methods during COINTELPRO:

1. Infiltration: Agents and informers did not merely spy on political activists. Their main purpose was to discredit and disrupt. Their very presence served to undermine trust and scare off potential supporters. The FBI and police exploited this fear to smear genuine activists as agents.
2. Psychological warfare: The FBI and police used myriad "dirty tricks" to undermine progressive movements. They planted false media stories and published bogus leaflets and other publications in the name of targeted groups. They forged correspondence, sent anonymous letters, and made anonymous telephone calls. They spread misinformation about meetings and events, set up pseudo movement groups run by government agents, and manipulated or strong-armed parents, employers, landlords, school officials and others to cause trouble for activists.
3. Legal harassment: The FBI and police abused the legal system to harass dissidents and make them appear to be criminals. Officers of the law gave perjured testimony and presented fabricated evidence as a pretext for false arrests and wrongful imprisonment. They discriminatorily enforced tax laws and other government regulations and used conspicuous surveillance, "investigative" interviews, and grand jury subpoenas in an effort to intimidate activists and silence their supporters.^[2]
4. Illegal force: The FBI conspired with local police departments to threaten dissidents; to conduct illegal break-ins in order to search dissident homes; and to commit vandalism, assaults, beatings and assassinations.^{[2][3][4][25]} The object was to frighten, or eliminate, dissidents and disrupt their movements.

File:Fred Hampton dead body.jpg

Body of Wikipedia:Fred Hampton, national spokesman for the Wikipedia:Black Panther Party, who was assassinated by members of the Chicago Police Department, as part of a COINTELPRO operation.
[2][3][4][24]

The FBI specifically developed tactics intended to heighten tension and hostility between various factions in the black militancy movement, for example between the Black Panthers, the US Organization and the Blackstone Rangers. This resulted in numerous deaths, among which were the US Organization assassinations of San Diego Black Panther Party members John Huggins, Bunchy Carter and Sylvester Bell.^[2]

The FBI also conspired with the police departments of many U.S. cities (San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Philadelphia, Chicago) to encourage repeated raids on Black Panther homes—often with little or no evidence of violations of federal, state, or local laws—which resulted directly in the police killing of many members of the Black Panther Party, most notably the assassination of Chicago Black Panther Party Chairman Wikipedia:Fred Hampton on December 4, 1969.^{[2][3][4][26]}

In order to eliminate black militant leaders whom they considered dangerous, the FBI conspired with local police departments to target specific individuals,^[27] accuse them of crimes they did not commit, suppress exculpatory evidence and falsely incarcerate them. One Black Panther Party leader, Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, was incarcerated for 27 years before a California Superior Court vacated his murder conviction, ultimately freeing him. Appearing before the court, an FBI agent testified that he believed Pratt had been framed because both the FBI and the Los Angeles Police Department knew he had been out of the area at the time the murder occurred. ^{[28][29]}

The FBI conducted more than 200 "black bag jobs",^{[30][31]} which were warrantless surreptitious entries, against the targeted groups and their members.^[32]

In 1969 the FBI special agent in San Francisco wrote Hoover that his investigation of the Black Panther Party (BPP) revealed that in his city, at least, the Panthers were primarily feeding breakfast to children. Hoover fired back a memo implying the career ambitions of the agent were directly related to his supplying evidence to support Hoover's view that the BPP was "a violence-prone organization seeking to overthrow the Government by revolutionary means".^[33]

Hoover was willing to use false claims to attack his political enemies. In one memo he wrote: "Purpose of counterintelligence action is to disrupt the BPP and it is immaterial whether facts exist to substantiate the charge."^[34]

In one particularly controversial 1965 incident, civil rights worker Wikipedia:Viola Liuzzo was murdered by Wikipedia:Ku Klux Klansmen who gave chase and fired shots into her car after noticing that her passenger was a young black man; one of the Klansmen was acknowledged FBI informant Gary Thomas Rowe.^{[35][36]} Afterward COINTELPRO spread false rumors that Liuzzo was a member of the Wikipedia:Communist Party and abandoned her children to have sexual relationships with Wikipedia:African Americans involved in the Wikipedia:civil rights movement.^{[37][38][39][40]} FBI informant Rowe has also been implicated in some of the most violent crimes of the 1960s civil rights era, including attacks on the Wikipedia:Freedom Riders and the 1963 Birmingham, Alabama Wikipedia:16th Street Baptist Church bombing.^[35] In another instance in Wikipedia:San Diego the FBI financed, armed, and controlled an extreme right-wing group of former Minutemen, transforming it into a group called the Secret Army Organization which targeted groups, activists, and leaders involved in the Anti-War Movement for both intimidation and violent acts.^{[41][42][43][44]}

Hoover ordered preemptive action "to pinpoint potential troublemakers and neutralize them before they exercise their potential for violence."^{[10][45]}

Illegal surveillance

The final report of the Wikipedia:Church Committee concluded:

Too many people have been spied upon by too many Government agencies and too much information has been collected. The Government has often undertaken the secret surveillance of citizens on the basis of their political beliefs, even when those beliefs posed no threat of violence or illegal acts on behalf of a hostile foreign power. The Government, operating primarily through secret informants, but also using other intrusive techniques such as wiretaps, microphone "bugs", surreptitious mail opening, and break-ins, has swept in vast amounts of information about the personal lives, views, and associations of Wikipedia:American citizens. Investigations of groups deemed potentially dangerous -- and even of groups suspected of associating with potentially dangerous organizations -- have continued for decades, despite the fact that those groups did not engage in unlawful activity.

Groups and individuals have been harassed and disrupted because of their political views and their lifestyles. Investigations have been based upon vague standards whose breadth made excessive collection inevitable. Unsavory and vicious tactics have been employed -- including anonymous attempts to break up marriages, disrupt meetings, ostracize persons from their professions, and provoke target groups into rivalries that might result in deaths. Intelligence agencies have served the political and personal objectives of presidents and other high officials. While the agencies often committed excesses in response to pressure from high officials in the Executive branch and Congress, they also occasionally initiated improper activities and then concealed them from officials whom they had a duty to inform.

Governmental officials -- including those whose principal duty is to enforce the law -- have violated or ignored the law over long periods of time and have advocated and defended their right to break the law.

The Constitutional system of checks and balances has not adequately controlled intelligence activities. Until recently the Executive branch has neither delineated the scope of permissible activities nor established procedures for supervising intelligence agencies. Congress has failed to exercise sufficient oversight, seldom questioning the use to which its appropriations were being put. Most domestic intelligence issues have not reached the courts, and in those cases when they have reached the courts, the judiciary has been reluctant to grapple with them.^{[46][47]}

Post-COINTELPRO operations

While COINTELPRO was officially terminated in April 1971, continuing FBI actions indicate that post-COINTELPRO reforms did not succeed in ending COINTELPRO tactics.^{[48][49][50]} Documents released under the FOIA show that the FBI tracked the late Wikipedia:Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Wikipedia:David Halberstam for more than two decades.^{[51][52]}

“Counterterrorism” guidelines implemented during the Reagan administration have been described as allowing a return to COINTELPRO tactics.^[53] Some radical groups accuse factional opponents of being FBI informants or assume the FBI is infiltrating the movement.^[54]

The FBI improperly opened investigations of American activist groups, even though they were planning nothing more than peaceful civil disobedience, according to a report by the Wikipedia:inspector general (IG) of the Wikipedia:U.S. Department of Justice. The review by the inspector general was launched in response to complaints by civil liberties groups and members of Congress. The FBI improperly monitored groups including the Thomas Merton Center, a Wikipedia:Pittsburgh-based peace group, Wikipedia:People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and Wikipedia:Greenpeace USA, an Wikipedia:environmental activism organization. Also, activists affiliated with Greenpeace were improperly put on a terrorist watch list, even though they were planning no violence or illegal activities. The IG report found the "troubling" FBI practices between 2001 and 2006. In some cases, the FBI conducted investigations of people affiliated with activist groups for "factually weak" reasons. Also, the FBI extended investigations of some of the groups "without adequate basis" and improperly kept information about activist groups in its files. The IG report also found that FBI Director Wikipedia:Robert Mueller III provided inaccurate congressional testimony about one of the investigations, but this inaccuracy may have been due to his relying on what FBI officials told him.^[55]

Several authors have accused the FBI of continuing to deploy COINTELPRO-like tactics against radical groups after the official COINTELPRO operations were ended. Several authors have suggested the Wikipedia:American Indian Movement (AIM) has been a target of such operations. A few authors go further and allege that the federal government intended to acquire Wikipedia:uranium deposits on the Lakota tribe's reservation land, and that this motivated a larger government conspiracy against AIM activists on the Pine Ridge reservation.^{[5][21][56][57][58]} Others believe COINTELPRO continues and similar actions are being taken against Wikipedia:activist groups.^{[58][59][60]}

Caroline Woidat argued that with respect to Native Americans, COINTELPRO should be understood within a historical context in which "Native Americans have been viewed and have viewed the world themselves through the lens of Wikipedia:conspiracy theory."^[61]

Other authors note that while some conspiracy theories related to COINTELPRO are unfounded, the issue of ongoing government surveillance and repression is nonetheless real.^{[62][63]}

See also

- H. Rap Brown (WP), targeted by COINTELPRO
- State Terrorism (WP)
- Wikipedia:Agent provocateur
- COINTELPRO targets
- Wikipedia:Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI
- Wikipedia:Cold war
- Wikipedia:The COINTELPRO Papers

- Wikipedia:Cuban Nationalist Movement
- Wikipedia:William Mark Felt, also known as Wikipedia:Deep Throat served as chief inspector of COINTELPRO field operations
- Howard Bruce Franklin, targeted by COINTELPRO
- Wikipedia:David Halberstam, targeted by COINTELPRO
- Wikipedia:Ernest Hemingway, targeted by COINTELPRO
- Wikipedia:Fred Hampton, targeted by COINTELPRO
- Wikipedia:Viola Liuzzo, murdered by a shot from a car used by four Ku Klux Klansmen, one of whom was a COINTELPRO informant
- Wikipedia:NSA call database
- Wikipedia:NSA warrantless surveillance controversy
- Wikipedia:Operation Mockingbird
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- Wikipedia:Police brutality
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